

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT *UPDATE*

July 1999

Glasgow turns tide for mitigation

When Charles and Lois Watts bought their small bungalow shortly after World War II, they were the first family on Gordon Street. Today, they are the last to leave.

"At the time, it was one of the nicest and cleanest in the neighborhood," remembers Lois. "After the '69 flood, the first buyers started moving out and none are left now."

After 51 years of moving their belongings upstairs with each hard rain, the Watts have followed many of their neighbors and left their family home. Though the departure could have sounded a death knell for the tiny town of Glasgow, it is instead a story of triumph of the human spirit and community pride.

Thanks to a partnership between local citizens and the combined efforts of federal, state, regional, and local government, the Watts have received an incentive to stay in Glasgow. Through the Glasgow Housing Relocation and Floodproofing Project, the Watts were able to move across town and out of the 100 year-flood plain.

The project began after the June 1995 flood when Mary Camp, Virginia's Hazard Mitigation Program Manager, received an invitation to discuss FEMA's program at a public meeting. Camp, along with representatives from FEMA and the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission, provided an overview of options including buyouts, relocation, and elevation of flood-prone homes.

She says the planning district commission then went to work creating a project team and developing their grant proposal which was submitted in the winter of 1995. Camp says the proposal then came to her office for review, which includes coordination with the Department of Conservation and Recreation's flood plain management program as well as environmental and historical impact assessments.

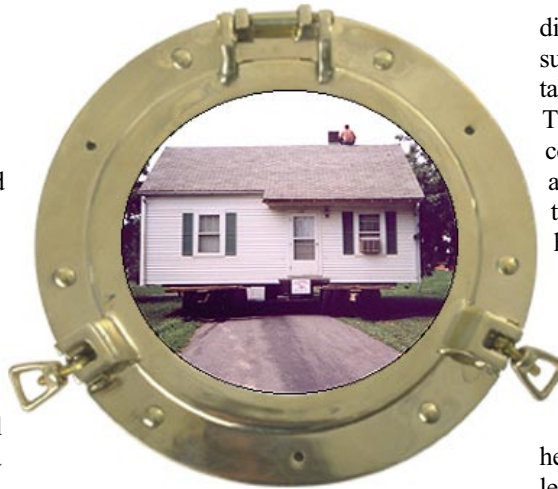


Photo of home being relocated out of the flood plain provided courtesy of the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission.

"In all these reviews, the state's priorities focus on direct action that moves people out of harm's way," says Camp.

After approval at the state level, the proposal moved to FEMA which allocated \$1.5 million through their Hazard Mitigation Grant Program in 1997 to relocate 35 flood-prone homes, elevate 14 and acquire and demolish seven. As the federal program provides only 75 percent of required funding, the commission also applied for and received a grant from the Department of Housing and Community Development as well as local and in-kind funds.

Bonnie Riedesel and Rebecca Joyce of the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission administer and manage the project. As of April, they say the project has completed the elevation, relocation, or acquisition of 14 houses. They expect to elevate four more and relocate one by early summer with the project slated to conclude in about a year.

"The Glasgow project is among the biggest the state's hazard mitigation program has attempted and the planning

district gets 100 percent of the credit for its success," says Camp. "Programs like this take about three or four years to complete. The project managers and oversight committee have worked diligently to accommodate each individual situation so that Glasgow citizens feel their interests have been protected."

In fact, FEMA recently recognized Glasgow as a "sustainable community" and a partner in the National Town Meeting for a Sustainable America. FEMA Region III Director, Rita

Calvan lauded their spirit of neighbor helping neighbor as well as efforts to lessen their vulnerability to flooding by working with FEMA, the commonwealth, and local businesses.

"FEMA is a household word around Glasgow," says mayor Sam Blackburn. "[Sustainable community status] recognizes us as a town that doesn't give up." He lauded Glasgow's citizens for weathering repeat floods; moving to higher ground in the middle of the night and watching the destruction of households they worked a lifetime to build.

Burlington Industries is Rockbridge County's largest employer and has maintained a presence in Glasgow since 1935. Ironically, they chose Glasgow as the site of their first carpet mill in the south due to the good supply of water and strong labor force. Since that time, neither resource seems to have diminished. *(continued on page 3)*

Inside

- ☐ **Radios linked to school safety - p. 2**
- ☐ **Y2K window of opportunity closing soon - Pullout Insert**
- ☐ **Terrorism threat reality check - p. 3**
- ☐ **Disaster education made easy - p. 4**

Communication links critical to safe schools

By now, the 911 distress calls from school administrators have become an all too familiar staple on network and local news broadcasts.

Whether it is a shooting in Colorado or a tornado in Oklahoma, school safety has become a hot button issue in the emergency services community.

In a crisis situation, an immediate communication link is vital to both victims and responders. NOAA Weather Radio can help. Working with the Federal Communications Commission's new Emergency Alert System, NOAA Weather Radio is an "all hazards" radio network, making it the single source for the most comprehensive weather and emergency information available to the public.

This nationwide system broadcasts warning and post-event information for all types of hazards — both natural (such as tornadoes and floods) and technological (such as chemical releases or oil spills) — 24 hours a day, seven days a week.



In Rockingham County, Va., administrators recently purchased approximately 40 radios to be placed in each school as well as the central, school board and transportation offices. Robert A. Symons, chief of the department of fire and rescue and deputy emergency services coordinator, says he made the suggestion to place weather radios in schools through his locality's "Safe Schools Committee."

Originally formed to promote school bus safety, the committee has mushroomed into a community-based task force involving school principals, law enforcement, social services, transportation, and other related departments, according to A.J. Botkin, Rockingham County schools' director of transportation and committee chairman.

Symons has been a member of the working group for a number of years and has developed a good working relationship with the members. He says the group has been active in promoting preparedness and conducting training drills for such crises as tornadoes and hostage situations. However, Symons adds that the VDES Tornado Preparedness Day promotional materials highlighted the need for the radios and helped expedite the purchase.

"Our committee felt we needed advance notice of weather emergencies and, with the push from the governor's office [statewide tornado drill], asked the assistant superintendent for instruction to fund the purchase," says Botkin. "Money has been allocated within the school system's budget for safe schools programs and the radios fell into this category."

NOAA radios were used during the statewide drill conducted in March. Botkin and Symons say the radios worked well and will also be valuable for a broad range of scenarios including alerting bus drivers of impending storms and highway hazards and informing school administrators of nearby chemical leaks or spills. Symons also touts the benefits of safe schools committees stating they are an excellent vehicle for promoting proactive approaches to public health and safety issues.

"Emergency managers need to build a good working relationship with the school system, not only for issues such as these radios, but also to promote safety as a whole," says Symons. "School safety has been in the limelight lately. This committee is one of the best and most effective working groups I've ever been associated with for promoting the common good."

Hopewell schools also use NOAA Weather Radios but have also gone one step beyond with the Hopewell Emergency Network System or HENS. In the event of an emergency such as a chemical release, this independent radio frequency provides accurate and timely information from industry to schools or businesses in the downwind plume.

According to Bob Brown, safety risk manager and emergency services coordinator, HENS receivers are located in industrial sites such as Hopewell's two Allied Signal plants as well as the schools and school board offices, community center, and John Randolph Medical Center.

He says the proposal for the system came through his office to his Local Emergency Planning Committee. In this way, industry buys into the program and subsidizes it through LEPC membership fees and prorated charges divided among member businesses. Startup costs include \$20,000 for the base system, including repeater and antennas plus \$750 per radio. Industry foots three-quarters of the \$1200 yearly maintenance fees while the city picks up the remainder of the balance.

The beauty of HENS lies in its capability to provide immediate, direct communication between key players in a crisis outside the fire or police bands. In the case of a chemical release, schools can receive and transmit real time updates to all parties.

The system is tested every Monday and proved its value last spring when a middle school student was hit by lightning on his way to class. The boy left the covered walkway while moving between buildings and Brown says he believes the direct radio link to the rescue squad helped to save the boy's life.

Normally, an emergency call of this nature goes through the 911 system and is then relayed to the appropriate responder such as fire, police, or a hospital. These radios cut out that intermediate step.

NOAA Weather Radio receivers can be purchased at many retail and department stores, boat and marine accessory businesses, some drug stores, and mail order catalogs. For more information, contact www.nws.noaa.gov/nwr/nwr.htm



Illustration from joint Red Cross, NOAA, FEMA radio brochure.

HAZ MAT



Plan now for terrorist threat or pay later

by Brett A. Burdick, PG, CHMM
Terrorism Program Manager

If you made a prioritized list of all the possible ways you might expect to die, terrorism would probably rank near the bottom of the list.

However, if you were to ask a public official to list the ways his or her community might become involved in a mass casualty or mass fatality incident, terrorism or criminal activity would have to rank near the top.

This "thought experiment" from Dr. Richard Falkenrath at the Kennedy School of Public Policy illustrates the need for emergency managers to address the issue of terrorism despite the low probability of a terrorist act actually being carried out in their communities. Though terrorism is not likely to affect a given person directly, it needs to be part of every responsible locality's disaster planning.

Keeping the threat of a terrorist incident in perspective is only one of many challenges facing Virginia's emergency managers. They must weigh the likelihood of a terrorist incident occurring in their communities versus the need to plan for it as well as assess the public's perception of the likelihood of a terrorist incident.

Despite an understanding among the general public that terrorism is a relatively rare event, there is also a general undercurrent of preoccupation with these acts. Fed by movies such as "Atomic Train" and "Broken Arrow," this undercurrent creates a climate of hysteria among the populace.

The hysteria brought about by these films has convinced many citizens that we are unusually vulnerable to the worst-case terrorist scenarios. Unfortunately, reality does not always make good viewing and the important and mundane jobs of emergency managers don't draw moviegoers to the box office.

Emergency managers need to put the real risks of terrorism in focus. Terrorists do not lurk behind every tree, but prudent communities will continue their methodical preparation for responding to these types of incidents. A clear understanding of the risks and threats of terrorism will help you do your job more effectively.

In the next 12 months, VDES will present 12 offerings of introductory and management level courses addressing this threat. The 8-hour course, "Public Safety Response to Terrorism," and the 16-hour course, "Public Safety Response to Terrorism — Management Considerations," will be available throughout the state.

For more information on programs available in your area, contact Mike Schlemmer at (804) 897-6568.



Gizmo "McGyvers" gases

What do you do when all the standard containment measures for a Hazmat situation aren't working? Improvise!

Responders to an ammonia release incident at a Bedford refrigerated warehouse recently faced this situation. When one plan after another failed to yield the desired results, on-site teams devised an innovative solution they dubbed "Gizmotron."

According to VDES Hazmat Officer Brian Iverson, responders invented the device as a modification to the water spray method of dispersing poisonous gases. They had tried other standard methods of tightening bolts, using freeze patches, and isolating the hazard by turning the valves — all without success.

Conventional water spray was also not an option because the runoff had to be specially remediated away from the locality's waste stream.

Gizmotron was constructed from the tops of two five-gallon water bottles sealed together with a garden sprinkler fed into one end and a PVC drain pipe attached to the other end. Iverson says ammonia concentration levels inside the building dropped significantly shortly after activating the device. In fact, it worked so well Gizmotron actually began to dissolve due to the large amount of ammonia gas it captured.

Iverson and Dave Nichols, Bedford County Emergency Services Coordinator, are working on a case study on this incident to be presented at the Feb. 2000 state Fire Chief's Association Mid-Winter Conference in Virginia Beach.

For more information, contact Brian Iverson at (804) 897-6577.



"Gizmotron was created in the field to contain an ammonia release (Photo by Brian Iverson)."

Glasgow Mitigation (continued from page 1)

According to Joyce, the project's population is a mixture of senior citizens and renters. In some cases, owners couldn't take the floods and couldn't sell their houses, so they rented them to Burlington factory workers.

She says many citizens had developed their own flood evacuation plans, which they put into action whenever they experienced a hard rain. In fact, one family had a routine that even specified which treasured photos were to be loaded into their camper.

Today, she says you don't have to look far to see a difference in the quality of life in Glasgow. One relocated

resident recently called to say thank you for the chance to sit on his new porch and enjoy the rain!

"We were happy to have the help," says Watts. "Now I can get a home where I can live in peace for the rest of my life."

For more information on this program or state flood mitigation projects, contact Mary Camp at (804) 897-6525.



Glasgow home undergoing elevation (Photo by Janet Clements).

Training Calendar

Emergency Management

Mass Fatalities Incident Management

July 13-15
Roanoke

Exercise Design

July 21-22/Lebanon
August 4-5/Charlottesville

Effective Communications

July 27-29
Roanoke

Decision Making and Problem Solving

August 10
Richmond

Coordinator's Briefing

August 11-12
Culpeper

EOC Operations and Management

August 17-19
Salem

ICS/EOC Interface

August 24-25
Culpeper

Reservist Training

Rapid Assessment Workbook Overview

July 8
Richmond

Emergency Information System Sustainment Training

August 5
Richmond

VEOC Tabletop Exercise II

August 5
Richmond

Technological Hazards

Public Safety Response to Terrorism (Train-the-Trainer)

July 26-27
Roanoke

Search and Rescue

Instructor's Staff Meeting/Workshop

July 17-18
Twin Lakes State Park,
Green Bay

SAR Council

July 24
Richmond

VEMA conference to focus on Y2K

Is there life after Y2K? The Virginia Emergency Management Association's summer conference will tackle that issue and more.

Slated for Aug. 18-20 in Chesapeake, the program will feature speakers and workshop sessions to exchange checklists and planning information for the new millennium.

Speakers from both the government and business sector will be on the agenda, which includes Betty Dillehay from the Century Date Change Initiative Office.

Contact Tom Hassler at hassler@jlab.org or Larry Smith at eslarry@aol.com for more information.

Guide streamlines disaster messages



Thanks to the National Disaster Education Coalition, disaster safety educators can now speak with one voice.

In a ground-breaking move, all national agencies involved in providing disaster safety information to the public have come together to create "Talking About Disaster: Guide for Standard Messages."

This publication contains fully coordinated messages about 13 hazards and general preparedness topics for communicators, educators, Web site builders or anyone who has a role in distributing disaster safety information to the public.

It is now available through your local Red Cross Chapter for \$3.15 each (plus shipping) or can be downloaded at www.redcross.org.safety/guide.html.

FEMA releases followup to hit CD

It topped the charts when it was released in 1997.

Now, the second edition of FEMA's Disaster Preparedness & Mitigation Library is available on CD-ROM.

Like its predecessor, this program offers fact sheets and brochures in easily accessible graphic image files and is designed for disaster educators who want to reproduce high-quality educational materials for their target audiences.

The set also includes such instant classics as 31 mitigation fact sheets and a revised CFP brochure, "Helping Children Cope with Disaster."

Act now to receive "The Extension Agent's Handbook for Disaster Preparation and Response."

Call 1-800-480-2520 to order the CD-ROM. Printouts of FEMA materials are available at www.fema.gov.



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